New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

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"Dream Girl"

The New York Times

DECEMBER 15, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Putting aside the prophet's robes and the sharp pen point of the pamphleteer, Elmer Rice has written as his more recent play an engaging and a cheerful comedy. Part fantasy, part farce, "Dream Girl" also is always human and is always pleasant. Since he knows a good actress when he sees her, Mr. Rice has invited Betty Field to play the leading role. Since she knows what is in his mind, being married to him, she gives a striking performance in that part.

The product of Mr. Rice's mellowing mood was offered for the first time last night at the Coronet, and since the evening seems to have been all the Rice this side of China, the author also directed and is a member of the sponsoring organization, the Playwrights' Company.

The play's Dream Girl is a young lady who runs an unsuccessful bookstore, her avocation being to dream more often while awake than while in bed. She fancies she is in love with her brother-in-law, and for a while he is the hero of her visions. Then comes a book reviewer with a laudable ambition to be a sports reporter, and he begins to take shape in her thoughts, first as a villain, then growing more likeable. Another bookman—the evening is literary—wishes to take her to Mexico, and she pictures how that would be; the newspaper man takes her to the theatre and instantly she is playing Portia.

It all comes out in the harmless way, of course, for at the end she accepts her sports writer, and he, with the liberality of the class, says she can dream some, but not too much.

* * *

In its basic form, "Dream Girl" is a little like "Lady in the Dark." There is a scene of reality, and then a scene of the young girl's vision as she imagines herself a heroine in various circumstances. Not all of the play is perfect, of course, for some of the first act is talky, some should be cut, and every now and then Mr. Rice sets up an easy mark to shoot at.

But when he is traveling at the right speed, the scenes flow cheerfully along—some extremely funny, some warm, all developing the nice characted the author and the distaff side of the house make of her.

* * *

Miss Field has a part that pales Hamlet's into polite insignificance. She is on the stage, in reality or dreams, all during the evening; it is a pleasure to have it so. Wistful as the uncertain girl probing her soul, she can be fierce with the book reviewer, amiably tough as a scarlet lady, amiably stately as Portia—and always a heroine.

Also very well cast, and excellent during the evening, is Wendell Corey as the reviewer who always is 95 per cent right about everything. Evelyn Varden is the girl's mother and William A. Lee her father; they, too, belong to the family. Kevin O'Shea, Helen Marcy, Sonya Stokowski and others appear in several roles on this and the other side of reality.

Another hero, and one not to be overlooked, is Jo Mielziner, whose

DREAM GIRL, a comedy in two acts, by El... Rice. Staged by Mr. Rice; settings desig... and lighted by Jo Mielziner; gowns desig... by Mainbocher; produced by the Playwrig... Company. At the Coronet Theatre:

Georgina Allerton	Betty F...
Lucy Allerton	Evelyn Var...
Radio Announcer	Keene Croc...
Dr. J. Gilmore Percival	William A. ...
George Allerton	William A. ...
Miriam Allerton Lucas	Sonya Stokow...
The Obstetrician	William A. ...
The Nurse	Evelyn Va...
Jim Lucas	Kevin O'S...
Claire Blakeley	Helen Ma...
A Stout Woman	Philippa Bev...
The Doctor	Don Stev...
Clark Redfield	Wendell Co...
A Policeman	James Greg...
The Judge	William A. ...
The District Attorney	Keene Crock...
George Hand	Edmond Ry...
Ben	Don Steve...
A Mexican	Wendell Co...
Two Other Mexicans	David Presm... / James Greg...
A Waiter	Stuart Ne...
Arabella	Sonya Stokow...
Luigi	David Presm...
An Usher	Gaynelle Hin...
Miss Delehanty	Helen Benn...
Antonio	Don Steve...
Salarino	Robert Fletch...
A Theater Manager	William A. L...
A Head Waiter	Keene Crock...
A Waiter	Robert Fletch...
Justice of the Peace Billings	William A. L...
A Chauffeur	Stuart Ne...

three-part setting moves in a... out to catch the different bits... action and different moods and... efficient as well as fanciful.

The Sun

DECEMBER 15, 1945

Elmer Rice Writes a Deft and Delightful Comedy in 'Dream Girl,' Hit at Coronet.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Elmer Rice, for thirty years a Broadway playwright, still has the magical touch. After several reverses in recent seasons he now turns to his hit-writing ways with a deft and stimulating comedy, "Dream Girl," brought into the Coronet last night by the Playwrights' Company. The theater of this town has suddenly begun to soar.

"Dream Girl," mingling realism with fantasy, is ingeniously staged via three moving platforms, dimming of lights and blackouts, with the scenery changing instantaneously and right before your eyes. It is exceptionally well acted. Betty Field, in one of the longest parts in years, distinguishes herself.

Playwright Rice has written some wonderfully sharp, observant and New York-wise dialogue, boy-and-girl style, into this new comedy. His play starts slowly and actually drags in some of its early portions—particularly in the bookshop scenes, which should be cut—but in the second half "Dream Girl" begins climbing and really takes hold, and it wins you completely before it has reached the final curtain.

The author of such hits as "On Trial" and "Street Scene" tells a story of a day in the life of a dream-bound girl. She is quite moonstruck and emotionally disturbed. In her darker moments, brought on by what seems a humdrum existence, she turns to daydreaming. In actuality, there are three men in the life of pretty Georgina Allerton—her brother-in-law, who wants to get a divorce and marry her; another married man who wants to seduce her, and a newspaper man who bullies her and tries to bring her back to reality.

In those moments when Georgina is given to fancy her imaginings run to the rhapsodic and wildly melodramatic. She daydreams herself into a courtroom as a defendant on trial for murder, having shot a book reviewer who didn't like her novel. She sees herself on a Mexican trip with a married book jobber, as a prostitute on the city's streets and as a flaming Portia, called upon suddenly to play "The Merchant of Venice." And finally, under the jolting influence of her newspaper man, she resolves her problems by eloping with hi... to Greenwich. And that's tha... And it's all told skillfully and e... gagingly and represents a feat i... stagecraft as well as one in play... writing.

Betty Field, whether gettin... slightly tight at a plush cockta... bar or lurching along the curb a... a bedraggled street walker, or in... toning the quality of merc... speech, strengthens a rapidl... growing impression that she i... one of the finest young actresse... our theater has. Wendell Corey... as the positive, tough-talkin... newspaper man, gives an ingrati... ating performance, improving a... it goes along. Edmon Ryan i... glib and suave and just right a... the would-be seducer. Evelyn... Varden is again her vigorous... earthy, capable self. And Wil... liam A. Lee plays about as many... roles as Willie Howard generall... undertakes in a revue—and doe... them well.

Elmer Rice, the man who intro... duced the flashback via "O... Trial," has come along with a de... lightful comedy. And the Play... wrights' Company has a solid hit.

New York Post
DECEMBER 15, 1945

Elmer Rice's 'Dream Girl' Stars Betty Field—and How!

By Wilella Waldorf

Elmer Rice has knocked together a vehicle for his wife, Betty Field, that will probably carry her in triumph straight back to Hollywood. "Dream Girl" is the title, and in it Miss Field plays a beautiful young lady going on 24 with a penchant for day dreaming. It was produced at the Coronet Theatre (formerly the Forrest) last night by the Playwrights' Company, egged on by Paramount Pictures.

This day dreaming business makes it easy for Mr. Rice to include an amazing number of roles for Miss Field to play. She even has a shot at Portia's Trial Scene from "The Merchant of Venice" (in costume), which will give you an idea of the way things happen at the Coronet.

"Dream Girl" begins with Miss Field occupying a single bed, very dejected because she's in love with her brother-in-law and he happens to be, not unnaturally, married to her sister.

It ends with her seated on a double bed in Greenwich, Conn., with a newly acquired husband after one of those early morning elopements. The husband is a literary critic for a New York newspaper who is feeling pretty high anyhow because he's just had an offer of a job as copy boy in the sports department.

His natural elation at the promotion causes him to do odd things, some of them amusing, but since he didn't enter the lists seriously until along in the second of the play's two acts, it was really too late, so far as we were concerned, for Wendell Corey to save the evening.

Until Mr. Corey became really active, our interest in Miss Field's dream world, as well as what was supposed to be reality, was not intense, and even after Mr. Corey started being merry, there was a gagged-up atmosphere about the scenes of his quick courtship that made them seem more like a set of revue skits than anything else.

Jo Mielziner has designed a series of little corners in restaurants, bookshops, bathrooms and beds ready to be pushed out from almost any angle whenever Miss Field happens to feel like getting dressed, taking a shower, washing her teeth, having lunch with an admirer who wants her to go to Mexico with him, or dreaming that she is having her sister's unborn babies by her brother-in-law.

If this sounds a trifle confused, that's how we feel after seeing "Dream Girl," which struck us for the most part as a surprisingly elementary excursion into Sex, Psychiatry and Literary Criticism containing absolutely nothing that could frighten the Hays office (or whatever they're calling it now).

Miss Field looks very attractive indeed in her Mainbocher gowns, Mr. Corey is beguiling as the newspaper man Mr. Rice has dreamed up for the occasion, Edmon Ryan has an easy way with him as the wolf who wants company on a trip to Mexico, while Evelyn Varden, apparently one of the few people left in town without a cold in the head, is required to sneeze continually.

Take it away, Hollywood!

DAILY NEWS
DECEMBER 15, 1945

'Dream Girl' Is a Dream of a Play And Betty Field a Dream of a Girl

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Dream Girl" Elmer Rice has written a captivating comedy, and in it his wife, Betty Field, gives an enchanting performance. So let this morning's report from the somewhat battered Broadway front be one of warm satisfaction.

Mr. Rice, usually pegged as a serious thinker among dramatists, has made com. dies before, but this one is his best. He has gone fishing in the stream of consciousness and has gaffed a prize catch—the story of a moony girl who daydreams from the moment she wakes up until the happy time of 4 the next morning when she is about to become a wife.

Physically and technically "Dream Girl" is a very interesting and wonderfully simple piece of work. On three rolling platforms—one in the middle of the stage which can glide back and one on each side which can glide into the wings—Designer Jo Mielziner has mounted and lighted a series of quick-changing settings which have style, humor and dramatic effect.

Through these settings moves Miss Field, from the rise of the first curtain to the descent of the last, with never a whole minute offstage. In a matter of seconds offstage while the platforms are shifting, Miss Field changes, for instance, from a girl having a luncheon date with a wolf to a girl who, having accepted the wolf's proposition, now is paying to the full the wages of sin—even to committing the drab suicide of a streetwalker.

Ah, What a Day!

This dreamy girl, Miss Field, wakes up and begins her imaginings by appearing at one of those radio comfort stations where shy little people hesitantly expose their love problems to a network of drooling listeners and a soupy-voiced interlocutor called Doctor something-or-other.

She is, she tells the Doctor, in love with her brother-in-law—which is inconvenient, because her brother-in-law is still married to her sister. Miss Field's day-dreaming continues as she gets up, dresses, goes to work in the failing bookshop of which she is part owner—a shop which is failing because it hasn't enough rental copies of "Forever Amber." Her day-dreaming proceeds, although it is interrupted by such realities as her own novel being bounced by a publisher once more and by the visit of a newspaper book reviewer who is crass and practical enough to sell her an armload of review copies for five dollars.

It ends, as it should, with Miss Field forgetting her brother-in-law and marrying this very annoying but clear-thinking journalist. And between the beginning and the end is a fine lot of wisdom, wit and banter. As Miss Field's mind carries her into such triumphs as an overnight success in the role of Shakespeare's Portia and such depths as the street-walker's suicide, Mr. Rice touches lightly, but sharply and cleanly, upon many topics of life as it is lived today.

Having written a rewarding comedy, Mr. Rice has gone further and directed it with finesse. His company, including Evelyn Varden, William A. Lee, Wendell Corey and Kevin O'Shea—all of whom double in Miss Field's dreams for many characters—is utterly amiable. And now I shall close this love letter to the Playwrights' Company, which produced "Dream Girl," and to Mr. and Mrs. Rice.

With some special XXX's here at the bottom for Mrs. Rice, if Elmer doesn't mind.

New York Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 15, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Dream Show

ELMER RICE'S "Dream Girl" is a comedy of sustained delight. No little of it stems from the utterly beguiling performance of Betty Field in the title role, but the star's writing-directing husband has given her a pliant springboard for her talents. The new offering at the Coronet Theater is the sort of show we have seen too little of this season. At base it is a play of substance, wit and subtlety. While its attractive contours are immeasurably enhanced by the expert performing of a cannily chosen company, the fun and fantasy are inherent in the written words and treatment. Mr. Rice deserves grateful tribute for this phenomenon.

* * *

He has not elected a simple theatrical idiom. The bemused heroine of "Dream Girl" is forever drifting back and forth from a reality she does not care to face and imagined experience. It makes for an inevitable repetition of factual and fanciful scenes. It might have resulted in a serious confusion of character and mood. To the great credit of the author, he has kept his plot fluent and varied, his daydreamer a solid character and her plight a matter of high comic concern. Moreover, with the stylish production which the Playwrights' Company has afforded, exciting settings of Jo Mielziner and Main-bocher's handsome costumes, the piece is freshly theatrical as well as enchanting.

* * *

Miss Field handles good material with scintillating skill. Her awakening as a rather dreary book store proprietress on what turns out to be an eventful day is a tour-de-force of semi-soliloquizing. Her subsequent encounter with a rude newspaper man, a mooning brother-in-law with whom he thinks she is in love and a tomcat book jobber are brilliant segements of a brilliantly articulated portrayal. The real heroine is recognizable and altogether appealing. The person she thinks she is as she envisages an amorous week-end in Mexico, a trollop's fate or a righteously indignant murder of the journalist is a figure of high comedy. Since the stage moves easily from scene to scene to hold the change of moods in an engaging tempo, she is irresistible.

Wendell Corey is superb in her chief support. His characterization of the blunt-spoken literary critic who jounces the belligerent virgin out of her day-dreams is a singularly sure piece of make-believe. Together with Miss Field he gives the play a depth and perception which might have been lost in the gay asides. There is meaning as well as high humor in "Dream Girl." Evelyn Varden has a nice bit as a wisely tough mother; William A. Lee keeps bouncing in and out of the real and imagined episodes with great effect. Kevin O'Shea is good as the brother-in-law and Edmon Ryan anchors the fantasy with his impersonation of the wolf. "Dream Girl" might as well be called a dream show. It finds the stage in high gear.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 15, 1945

Elmer Rice Writes Bright Comedy

And Betty Field Sparkles in Light, Witty Role

By BURTON RASCOE.

Elmer Rice, the fire-eating genius among American playwrights, hitherto known (aside from his dramas) for his triple detestations—the capitalist system, the commercial theater and drama critics—has come up with a witty and utterly charming romantic comedy, celebrating the solid bourgeois virtues and the capitalistic American scene. There is not the slightest tinge of pink in it, except for the nightgown in which Betty Field is first disclosed as soon as the curtain is up and in the baby spotlights Jo Mielziner throws upon her.

The play is called "Dream Girl," starring Miss Field (Mrs. Elmer Rice) and featuring Wendell Corey and Evelyn Varden. It opened last night at the Coronet. It should remain there quite a while. It is a sweet and heart-warming comedy, with some subacid satire, a substantial sort of entertainment which one can recommend to young and old, the sophisticated and the squeamish, without fear of its insulting their intelligence, offending their tastes or subverting their morals.

On the surface, "Dream Girl" is only an unusually literate and credible soap opera of the boy-meets-girl type, wherein mutual repulsion is overcome, after handicaps and complications, and melts into the tender passion. But beneath the thin and platitudinous plot, there is a salutary recognition that dreams should be balanced by an awareness of reality and that, on the other hand, a too acute sense of reality should be balanced by dreams, lest it degenerate into cynicism and apathy.

All this is glossed with an originality of treatment, a deft sense of character and individuality, a worldly knowingness and a humorous, though compassionate, sympathy. The flesh and sinew and the garments that round out the skeleton of a plot are supplied by the creative magic of good theater.

It is no secret that Miss Field is one of the loveliest women of the stage and also one of the most endearing and talented. She has an ingenuous grace, a compact of naturalness, simplicity and warmth. Last night she disclosed that her range is wider than one thought; that she is a comedienne who can run the gamut from subtle satire to broad burlesque.

Good Supporting Cast.

Miss Field could wish for no better support than she gets from the entire cast, particularly from Wendell Corey, who has the romantic lead opposite her. Mr. Corey will be remembered (at least by some) for the notable performances he gave in two brave failures, "—But Not Goodbye" and "The Wind is Ninety." Playing the part of a completely extroverted, knowledgeable and self-assured newspaperman with a wide streak of honest and homely sentiment in him in this play, he is ingratiating in a manly and honest way.

The comedy considers the plight of a 22-year-old virgin who is disturbed by her spinsterhood and yet constantly takes such flights from reality in romantic dreams of happiness, adventure and accomplishment that there is little difference between her waking and her sleeping state. Even when opportunities come to face the hard, bright facts of life, she evades them by immediately transfering them into daydreams of vicarious wish-fulfillment. She never tests the reality itself.

She imagines she is secretly in love with her younger sister's husband, an indolent escapist like herself. She runs a bookshop at a constant loss under the impression that is doing something useful. She writes a novel that is trash and imagines she is misunderstood when publishers reject it. She readily becomes an adventuress, a streetwalker, a famous stage star and a homesteader on a ranch—in her mind.

Bright Stage Devices.

The transitions from Miss Field's dream world to reality and back again are cleverly managed not only by Mr. Rice but by means of the mechanical devices which Mr. Mielziner has set up for his changes of scene. Some of these scenes are very funny, particularly the one wherein Miss Field imagines she is a streetwalker who sinks to the lowest depths of degradation and takes poison. They reduce her daydreams to their ultimate romantic absurdity.

Evelyn Varden, who is featured as Miss Field's sleazy and indolent but unsentimental mother, adds to the gayety of the evening and there are brief bits excellently played by Sonya Stokowski, Jim Lucas, William A. Lee, Kevin O'Shea, David Pressman, Keene Crockett and Don Stevens, some of them playing various roles in the dream sequences because theirs are the faces Miss Field is familiar with. It is good to have such an able craftsman as Mr. Rice in a romantic comedy mood.

PM

DECEMBER 16, 1945

—Kronenberger—

A Jolly Night With The Rices

PM Reviews

In the beginning there was a tiny yarn of Logan Pearsall Smith's; then came Mr. Thurber's *Secret Life of Walter Mitty;* and now comes *Dream Girl.* There's getting to be a nice little group of amusing pieces about chronic day-dreamers and their grandiose, highbusted, melodramatic day dreams. Actually it's rather odd that nobody until Mr. Rice has thought of using some one's day dreams on the stage, where they can be acted out in all their lusciousness. The nearest things to it, in certain effects, were *Beggar on Horseback* and *Lady in the Dark,* but they were fundamentally unlike it in intention. *Dream Girl* deserves a modest salute for its novelty. For most of the first half I was afraid there wouldn't be a great deal else to salute it for; but it found its stride before the first-act curtain came down, and after the second-act curtain went up all was well, and at moments mildly wonderful. All in all Mr. Rice has written a very entertaining show, and Mr. Rice will be rewarded with a hit.

It is equally Mrs. Rice's show, Mrs. Rice being Betty Field, its star. As Georgina Allerton, the yearning young lady who passes so much of her time in trances, Miss Field is capital. The part calls for some one who must not only sustain a basic characterization, but also bound off into the many unprosaic roles—ranging from the statuesque to the depraved—that stem from her imagination. It calls, in other words, for a presiding knowledge of a bright but rather silly girl, but for immense versatility, too, and a very elastic comedy sense. Miss Field displays, with only rare lapses, all of these things. She is faithful to each of her roles, and funny in most of them. She is, in fact, about the most accomplished actress of her age now on Broadway.

• • •

We are with Georgina from eight o'clock one morning till four the next. From the play's standpoint, she gets out of bed on the wrong side, for her first plunges into Imagination's tank and her first brushes with reality are pretty forced and flat, and not always in the happiest taste. Georgina worrying about her virginity and day-dreaming herself into having babies and committing murder is just no fun. But as the lunch hour approaches, and the three men in her life complicate its reality and stimulate its day-dreams, matters improve. By dinner time—when the newspaperman she thinks she hates but really loves takes over—matters improve still more. By midnight they are all you can ask; and by 4 a. m. when she is a bride up in Greenwich, they are in a state of near-triumph.

Though two or three of Georgina's day dreams (as a lady on a sinful toot, or as a tragedy-queen streetwalker) are fine broad burlesque, the play is mainly at its best when she is just plain Georgina, or rather fancy Georgina, opposing her riled, romantic self to her newspaperman's brusque but bright-eyed handling. This relationship smacks a trifle of that between Sally and the sergeant in *The Voice of the Turtle;* but it wins through on its own terms.

Dream Girl is ingeniously acted out in miniature sets rolled on and off on triple tracks, with natural lighting for Georgina's real life and blue lights for her imaginary one. All this is expertly achieved, and matches Mr. Rice's expert direction. As for the cast, Wendell Corey is excellent as the newspaperman—a really adequate foil for Miss Field. Kevin O'Shea and Edmon Ryan are all right as Georgina's other gents, and Evelyn Varden is splendid as her mother. Jo Mielziner's many small sets are uniformly good, the best, indeed, having a kind of terse elegance, or neat wit.

—Louis Kronenberger.

Journal American

DECEMBER 15, 1945

Elmer Rice's 'Dream Girl' Opens at the Coronet Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Elmer Rice, having made up a new one for Betty Field, permitted The Playwrights' Company, of which he is a charter member, to fetch it last night into the Coronet theatre, riding high, wide and handsome on the running board of some new-fangled scenery invented by Jo Mielziner. The outcome is thoroughly satisfactory, combining much that is best in good, mean fun and good, keen acting.

The husband of Betty Field has indulged in this sort of jollity before. In "See Naples and Die," in "Not For Children," and, four or five years go, in "Two on an Island," he had himself a time.

But not previously has he had himself a time with such gayety and gusto as he displays in "Dream Girl." These evenings, in what is perhaps Broadway's most chi-chi theatrical interior, our Elmer seems to be having the time of his playwriting life. And, if a first audience may be taken at its laughter, the folks out front are having the time of their playgoing lives concurrently.

Not that "Dream Girl" is without social significence. Any play from The Playwrights' Company must have its substratal message, its, if I know what I mean, idealogy. I forget what Elmer Rice's is!

• • •

Lady in the Light

Even so, I don't forget that "Dream Girl" draws the taunting, yet penetrating, portrait of the Georgiana Allerton whose middle name is legion here on Manhattan. An upper middle-class American with time on her hands and nothing interesting to do with it, she plays at work, works at play and carries the primal urge about with her as if it were a puppy on a lead.

A daydreamer without humor, a laughless lady in the light, three major men cross Georgiana's prim, rather than primrose, path. Each, after his fashion, desires her.

Why? Don't ask! Suffice it to learn that Jim Lucas is a wishy-washy wonder-man who is married to her sister; that George Hand is a handsome mismarried man in search of what he calls understanding; that Clark Redfield is the metropolitan newspaperman all metropolitan newspapermen yearn secretly to be, a classy combination of Bugs Baer, Louis Sobel, Bill Corum and the late Heywood Broun.

It is this composite columnist who comes off victoriously in the end. If, let me add, marrying the dear, yet dumb, Georgiana Allerton can be said to smack even remotely of victory.

• • •

Moments of Mockery

The unfolding of our dream girl's dreams versus our dream girl's realities is more diverting than it sounds in the retelling. Elmer Rice has written scene after scene of clever conversation, adult observation and caustic commentary. These are seasoned with bits of out and out burlesque and moments of mild and well-meant derision. They add up to a provocative entertainment.

Betty Field, in a role longer than Shakespeare's Hamlet and gowns out of Mainbocher's top drawer, is the Georgiana Allerton her playwriting husband asks for. She does him, and herself proud.

Evelyn Varden, my fine feathered friend of Baltimore's Vagabond Theatre days, is beautifully biting as Georgiana's disillusioned mother. Wendell Corey, as the composite columnist, fulfills the promise he made in "The Wind Is Ninety." Edmon Ryan and Kevin O'Shea, as Clark Redfield's dual rivals, are generally as they should be. Helen Bennett's is a grand Miss Delehanty...

Elmer Rice and his fellow members of The Playwrights' Company have a fine, fresh comedy on their roster in this meaningful, mocking "Dream Girl." It's bound to ride triumphantly on Joe Mielziner's moving platforms.

"Hamlet"

PM

DECEMBER 14, 1945

—Kronenberger—

The GIs Knew A Good Thing

PM Reviews

Maurice Evans has brought back from the wars the version of *Hamlet* that he offered to GIs in the Pacific, and Michael Todd has produced it in his usual handsome style. It is a swift-moving, cleanly blocked-out, palpably shortened version, and it's no wonder that it went over, among soldier audiences, with a bang. Not that I can see why people wonder that any half-way decent *Hamlet* should go over with anybody. It continues to be, by all odds, the most fascinating stage piece in the English language. If it is highbrow, then so much the worse for what is lowbrow. If it is highbrow, then any one with the slightest sense of the dramatic, with the slightest feeling for language, with the slightest interest in human beings can't help becoming a highbrow for the nonce. What play, unless it be *Macbeth*, gets faster under way; what plot unfolds with greater excitement? What character is more absorbing than Hamlet, or more sympathetic, or more modern? All *Hamlet* has ever needed, on the stage, was a chance to prove itself.

Mr. Evans has always given it that chance, whether in the standard version, in the uncut version that became a magnificently swirling melodrama, or in the present version that makes up in theatrical vigor for what it loses in richness and complexity. For Broadway, the present version has been ingeniously staged in an early 19th-century period style—a conception that brings it much nearer to us as a court drama and human tragedy, yet not so near that its passions and its poetry must be cabined inside too realistic a frame. Hamlet ceases to be a slightly barbaric and becomes a mildly Byronic figure. If the 19th century was hardly an age of ghosts, it was much more an age in which sons, harassed by the amorous guilt of their mothers, were torn too many ways to enact swift vengeance; much more an age of bitter, sardonic, witty, introspective heroes. Scenically, moreover, this *Hamlet* has a good deal to catch the eye; and though the costumes have more period style than the sets, the general effect is at least a concrete one.

* * *

As for Mr. Evans, this is a *Hamlet* that he entirely dominates; which is just as well, since his supporting cast is no more than, and not always, serviceable. He dominates it with his sure stage presence, with his force of personality, with his perfected powers of utterance. Nobody makes Shakespeare's words come forth clearer or rounder or more immediately intelligible, nobody gets more rhetorical value or direct meaning out of Shakespeare's lines. Mr. Evans remains, for me, too purely elocutionary in some moments, he works up steam rather than feeling in some of his emotional scenes, and I can't feel that his Hamlet is really dredged up from the deep places of that puzzling soul. His is not, in the end, a very inward or a very moving Hamlet. Yet, beyond its verbal excellence, it has its acting virtues. When Hamlet can be derisive, as with Polonius, or fiercely contemptuous, as with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or sardonic—as a way of making his emotions—as with Ophelia, he is very successful indeed. There is more to his Hamlet than I think there used to be; and in delivering things like the greatest of the soliloquies (*O what a rogue and peasant slave am I*) he is all that he ever was.

This *Hamlet* moves fast and builds well by cutting a number of scenes and omitting others, most notably that with the gravediggers. George Schaefer has provided good direction, and the cast, for one that isn't strong, works smoothly enough. Lili Darvas has not Gertrude's passionateness, nor Frances Reid—though competent in an always thorny part—Ophelia's charm. Thomas Gomez gets more character than usual into the role of Claudius; Thomas Chalmers less than the usual fun out of Polonius. Emmett Rogers isn't a very excitable Laertes, though since Laertes is commonly too excitable, this is no tragedy. Walter Coy passes muster in the cut-down part of Horatio, and most of the minor characters are adequate.

—Louis Kronenberger

'HAMLET.'

Shakespeare's play; Maurice Evans production; staged by George Schaefer; scenery designed by Frederick Stover; costumes designed by Irene Sharaff; music by Roger Adams; presented by Michael Todd at the Columbus Circle Theater Thursday, December 13, 1945. The cast:

Bernardo.....William Weber
Francisco.....John Bryant
Marcellus.....Alexander Lockwood
Horatio.....Walter Coy
Ghost of Hamlet's Father.....Victor Thorley
Claudius, King of Denmark.....Thomas Gomez
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.....Maurice Evans
Gertrude, Queen of Denmark.....Lili Darvas
Polonius.....Thomas Chalmers
Laertes, son of Polonius.....Emmett Rogers
Ophelia.....Frances Reid
Reynaldo.....Frank Bendtsen
Rosencrantz.....Howard Morris
Guildenstern.....Booth Colman
Player King.....Nelson Leigh
Player Queen.....Blanche Collins
Player Villan.....Alan Dreeben
Player Prologue.....Alan Masters
Fortinbras, Prince of Norway.....Leon Shaw
Norwegian Captain.....Nelson Leigh
Osric.....Morton Da Costa
Lords, Ladies, Soldiers and Attendants: Nan McFarland, Jane Pipan, Janet Slauson, Robert Berger, John Bryant, Alan Dreeben, Charles Goff, Robert Hartung, Bill Lovitt, Robert Paxtens, Frank Rooney, Ray Walston and William Weber.

SYNOPSIS: The entire action takes place in Denmark. Act I. Scene 1. The battlements of the castle at Elsinore. Scene 2. Main hall in the castle. Scene 3. Apartment of Polonius. Scene 4. Battlements of the castle. Scene 5. Apartment of Polonius. Scene 6. Main hall in the castle. Scene 7. Chapel in the castle. Act II. Scene 1. The open court in the castle. Scene 2. The chapel in the castle. Scene 3. The queen's apartment. Scene 4. A cellar room in the castle. Scene 5. A hall in the castle. Scene 6. Street leading to the port. Scene 7. Main hall in the castle. Scene 8. The open court in the castle.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 14, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

After a thorough tryout in the Central Pacific, Maurice Evans' latest interpretation of "Hamlet" arrived last evening at the newly named Columbus Circle Theatre. This is the so-called "GI version," and it is an interesting and a good one. Distant students of Shakespeare made it popular in Army camps during the war, and now that discharge buttons sprinkle the near coast, it should be popular again. Mr. Evans, a friend of the Dane in two previous incarnations, is playing the tale for story and action; he is aiming it now for the million, and not as caviare to the general. He succeeds on his premise, and he offers a fine show.

* * *

Lest the classicists worry, Mr. Evans has not danced on all the graves of tradition, nor has he placed a night club in Elsinore. He has made some changes in the play as usually offered. The gravediggers' scene and the skull of Yorick have vanished, the actor's earthy critics on the Pacific islands having found that too old-fashioned for their tastes. Mr. Evans also has advanced the time to one more nearly the present; "Hamlet" now takes place in the nineteenth century. The costumes are more modern than is customary, although not, of course, business suits. In his production, both as editor and interpreter, the actor has sought to pry the production from the printed page and its usual illustrations and bring it closer to general, non-historically minded comprehension. And "Hamlet" unquestionably can be done that way.

The danger of a matter-of-fact production is that the man who plays Hamlet may himself grow so casual he sounds as though he were reading the daily papers. It is true, probably, that some of Shakespeare's poetry has gone from the current version, but Mr. Evans still retains the fire. His Hamlet is a sarcastic, bitter and vindictive man, but all a man. He scorns the interpretation sometimes given that the Prince was a weakling, unable to make up his mind when to strike. Had Hamlet killed his step-father right after hearing the ghost, there would have been no play—a fact that Shakespeare no doubt knew and with which Mr. Evans obviously agrees. As he plays it, his mind is made up, only circumstances prevent the execution.

Beyond the leading player, the cast is at times of mixed quality. Frances Reid makes a good Ophelia, especially in the mad scene following the death of Polonius. This latter role is played by Thomas Chalmers; the portrait is of a bumbling windbag, forgetful and pompous and worthy the sneer of Hamlet. As Claudius, the king, Thomas Gomez seems not to start evolving a character until the end. Threats do not dismay him; he wanders through peril of sudden death as though nothing were happening; he carries matter-of-factness to the ultimate extreme, and perhaps beyond. The queen is played by Lili Darvas, who might be a bit easier, and Emmett Rogers is Laertes. Nelson Leigh as the Player King is briefly nice as a nineteenth-century "ham" being warned by his royal director.

A note on the physical production: Frederick Stover, who assisted Mr. Evans when he was Major Evans, has designed excellent settings for the play, and Irene Sharaff has done the same for the costumes. The music, by Roger Adams, also is in nineteenth century spirit, even to a waltz. George Schaefer, also a Pacific alumnus, directed.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 14, 1945

Maurice Evans' Lively 'Hamlet' Is an Admirable Piece of Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If anybody wants to establish a rule that Shakespeare can be spoken only by Maurice Evans I shall have no objection, for Mr. Evans makes things clear and alive and exciting. His new "Hamlet," which Michael Todd presented last night at the Columbus Circle Theatre, is a case in point.

This "Hamlet" is an elaboration of the G. I. version that Evans, until recently a major in the AUS, assembled and played in Pacific bases. Its chief interest could be its novelty—its speed, its untraditional costumes, its dropping of the gravediggers' scene and its belief that Hamlet was neither melancholy nor a nut.

But its chief interest is none of these things; it is Mr. Evans himself, for he is an actor. He has enthusiasm, intelligence, judgment, and a way of speaking which makes you think how silly you were not to think of talking Shakespeare this way before now.

The new "Hamlet" is in 15 scenes and two acts. It has pace, but not the consciously frenzied pace of a version done a good many years ago by Norman Bel Geddes and Raymond Massey. Its scenery, by Frederick Stover, looks, for once, like scenery. Most Shakespearean productions look like a combination of Dazian's curtain emporium and a main intersection of the Roman catacombs.

Excellent Costumes.

The new "Hamlet" has costumes by Irene Sharaff which are unusual but not disturbingly tricky. The officers of the guard seem to be wearing U. S. Army overcoats and overseas caps and Hamlet goes around in double-breasted lounge suits. Ophelia could step right off the stage and go to a party in a night club in the pretty dress she wears, and so could Queen Gertrude. Polonius, being fussy, wears a monocle.

This costuming is, obviously, unusual, but it is most pleasant and not the least intrusive. It is not modern dress, but near enough to it to remove "Hamlet" from the Elizabethan period and make it a comfortable sort of no-period-at-all. It is quite pleasant to hear a Hamlet speak the soliloquy while wearing pants, because the usual black tights show the kneecaps and a man's kneecaps are not particularly beautiful.

Of the members of Mr. Evans' company, I thought Thomas Chalmers, as Polonius, was the best, and and that Frances Reid was a very nice Ophelia. Lili Darvas finally did manage some of the guilt of Queen Gertrude, but it took me a while to get the hang of her accent. About the only improvement I could suggest for an otherwise fine and exciting production would be to have Orson Welles act Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at one and the same time. Or just drop the characters altogether.

Journal American

DECEMBER 14, 1945

'Hamlet' Presented At Columbus Circle

By ROBERT GARLAND

Maurice Evans, speaking a piece last night at the newly-named Columbus Circle Theatre, voiced his—and his audience's—thanks that his playwright, a chap called Bill, and his producer, a chap called Mike, had joined forces and put on a show. Which, believe me, they had done, thanks to the actor-chap called Maury. Between the theatre-minded three of them, the event was momentous.

This is the GI version of the William Shakespeare "Hamlet" in which Maurice Evans has been appearing overseas. Demobilized up near Central Park by Michael Todd, it is the greatest show in town.

It is the greatest show in town because of the greatness of the central figure in Maurice Evans' hands. His Hamlet, like any other genius, is the result of an infinite capacity for taking pains. His sweet Prince of Denmark is no mere melancholy Dane, but a sensitive, tortured, sardonic human being with all the weakness and shame to which mankind is heir. And all the strength and glory!

The actor-chap called Maury lives and loves his Hamlet as few players have lived and loved him in all my days and generations. Johnston Forbes-Robertson, I remember. John Barrymore, oft-times. And Basil Sidney, whose streamlined version had its ups and downs.

* * *

GI Prince

Knowing Hamlet the way he knows him, both as a character and a play, Maurice Evans is not afraid of either him or it. Or of the William Shakespeare who is the creator of the character as well as the author of the play. He neither kisses him on the brow, as the elder actors did, nor slaps him on the back, as a Margaret Webster would. Instead he shakes hands and calls him Bill!

The result is a right-as-rain revival of the best English-written play, by the best English-writing playwright, with the best English-speaking Shakespearean actor in the title role. "Hamlet!"

This GI "Hamlet," this "Hamlet" by the writer-chap called Bill, this "Hamlet" by the producer-chap called Mike, this "Hamlet" by the actor-chap called Maury, is in two acts and 15 scenes. It begins at the beginning, passes through the middle, stops when it gets to the end. Or it almost stops, as honesty bids me add. The grand finale could still be cut, along with the talk leading up to the duel.

But this is quibbling. So right is this two theatre-minded gentlemen's production of the one theatre-minded gentleman's play, that any fault-finding is an impertinence. If this GI "Hamlet" is good enough for Shakespeare—which it is!—it is good enough for you or me.

* * *

A-1 Cast

In Maurice Evans' surrounding cast are Lili Darvas, Thomas Gomez, Thomas Chalmers, Frances Reid, Walter Coy and Emmett Rogers. Miss Darvas is a regal, understandable Gertrude, Queen of Denmark. What she ever saw in Claudius, I'll never know. Neither, I guess, did William Shakespeare. Mr. Gomez is a not-quite-so-regal, but even more understandable, Claudius, her King.

Mr. Chalmers is a wry Polonius, an amusing old windbag when you don't—along with Laertes and Ophelia—have to live in the same palace with him. And Miss Reid is an Ophelia who deserves the burial scene they've taken from her.

The Horatio of Mr. Coy is easier on eye than ear. He seems afraid, or unable, to bring out the companionship existing between himself and the sweet prince who is his guide, philosopher and friend. Mr. Rogers is more to the manor born as Laertes. In the final act, with Denmarkanians dying all about him, he is at his best. The others are, for the most part, excellent...

Well up among the assets are the staging by George Schaefer, the backgrounds by Frederick Stover, the costumes by Irene Sharaff, the accompanying music by Roger Adams and its rendition by William Brooks and orchestra ...Maurice Evans spoke wisely and well when he called this GI "Hamlet" a momentous occasion. It is! And Maury, the actor-chap, is a goodly part of it.

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 14, 1945

— By HOWARD BARNES —

To Be . . . A Hit

THE Maurice Evans production of "Hamlet," which Michael Todd is offering at the Columbus Circle Theater, is an ingenious piece of showmanship. The actor has cut the Shakespeare drama stringently. At the same time, he has preserved its poetry and made it surprisingly articulate on a stage. Prompted by his performances before G. I. audiences during the last several years, he has accented the melodramatic action whenever possible in an effort to match eloquence with theatrical excitement. Since he plays the gloomy Dane with a mounting crescendo of leashed violence and has a superb Ophelia in Frances Reid, the stunt is notable.

• • •

It is fortunate that the mad scene comes off as well as it does. For a time the staccato pace of the production, the clamoring musical accompaniment of Roger Adams and the attempts of the company to be off-hand and declamatory at one and the same time lead to a glut of great lines. Condensation has not made for variety of illusion in the offering, nor has it allowed the glowing speeches of the classic to be properly framed. There is a rush of scenes during the early stanzas of this Shakespearian revival which is alien to the subjective profundities it is probing. Not until the vaguely Edwardian blood and thunder treatment is resolved in Ophelia's tragedy does the production become luminous as well as engrossing.

• • •

Evans essays a part which is forever tempting and frequently tripping fine actors. On the whole, he handles it handsomely. There is never a moment when he cannot be heard and understood as Shakespeare must have intended the character to be realized by spectators. If he falters, it is in holding to too rigid a tempo in his performance, slighting the subtle blend of gesture and phrase which can be electrifying in "Hamlet." The celebrated soliloquies are nothing short of wonderful in his hands. The mounting fury with which he contemplates revenge on his murderous uncle and mother is explicit and self-tortured. One only wishes that he had given himself and his production more breathing spells.

• • •

Miss Reid is extraordinarily assured in the part of Ophelia. It is a portrayal which contrasts vividly with that of Thomas Gomez, who plays the usurping king as straight as a die, or Lili Darvas's stern impersonation of the harassed queen. When Miss Reid and Evans are together in the play within a play scene, or the former delivers her magnificent lament, "Hamlet" has genuine emotional dimensions. Thomas Chalmers gives a stalwart reading of Polonius; Walter Coy is good as Horatio and Emmett Rogers plays a superior Laertes. George Schaefer has staged the show as Evans undoubtedly wished him to and Frederick Stover's settings are in a properly melancholy and Graustarkian mood. Shakespeare has once more done more than his share to enliven a theatrical season.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

New York Post

DECEMBER 14, 1945

Maurice Evans Returns As a 19th Century 'Hamlet'

— By Wilella Waldorf —

After four years as an officer in the U. S. Army producing everything from musical comedy to Shakespeare for GIs in the Central Pacific area, Maurice Evans returned to Broadway last night with a new "Hamlet," revealed at the Columbus Circle Theatre under the benevolent auspices of that zealous connoisseur of the arts, Michael Todd. One of the finest Hamlets of our time, Mr. Evans has lost none of his skill. His latest version of the play is a stirring, moving, impressive affair. Here once more is a chance to see a great drama beautifully done.

Mr. Evans' last appearance hereabouts as the Dane was in the unabridged version directed by Margaret Webster. That brilliant production convinced us that it is little short of a crime to cut "Hamlet." One has never really seen and heard this play until it is experienced in its entirety. Yet the full text takes some four hours to present, and as Mr. Evans explained in print only recently, the strain of eight performances a week on the actor who plays the title role is apt to prove too much.

Advance news stories have referred to the latest Evans venture somewhat alarmingly as "the streamlined G I 'Hamlet,'" a description which turns out to be both inaccurate and misleading. Cut it certainly is, if you recall the fact that Mr. Evans was last associated with "Hamlet" in its entirety. But, compared to most modern productions of the work, it is remarkably full, requiring nearly three hours to perform, and while it is true that there is little delay in shifting scenes and that the play moves with celerity, there is nothing to justify the fears of those who mistrust the word "streamlined" as a synonym for twentieth century slap-dashery and ultra-modern revisions.

No Gravediggers

Mr. Evans' two most radical departures from the norm are: (1) His deletion of the churchyard scene, entire, including Ophelia's funeral, both Gravediggers and Hamlet's "Alas, poor Yorick" speech, and (2) His decision to give the play a nineteenth century background instead of doing it, as usual, in Elizabethan costumes.

As one who has never been an abject admirer of even the less boring of Shakespeare's clowns, we hardly missed the Gravediggers last night and while it did seem a little queer not to see Ophelia buried, and hear the familiar "Yorick" lines, there is an excellent case to be made out for Mr. Evans' omission of this particular scene in favor of other lesser known but equally effective passages.

As for the early nineteenth century background, it is possible that the actor decided on it originally because he thought the GIs might find the sight of their buddies in tights just a bit too much for their risibilities. There is, however, another valid reason for this experiment, and that is, to emphasize once again the amazing universality and timelessness of this magnificent drama.

Still a Period Piece

Broadway theatre-goers who happened to be getting about in 1925 will recall the astonishing ease with which Basil Sydney and his fellow players put on an up-to-the-minute version of the tragedy with Hamlet wearing lounge suit or tuxedo, Polonius was shot, not stabbed, the Queen had a telephone in her boudoir and the First Gravedigger wore a bowler hat.

That production proved to many of us that, however "Hamlet" is produced, the play's the thing, and if it is acted to the hilt, few experiences in the theatre can be more rewarding. In choosing the nineteenth century period, Mr. Evans gets away from the traditional Elizabethan style of presentation, and gives the play a more modern feel without making the production seem merely a stunt, as a fully up-to-date version is apt to do at times, no matter how carefully arranged.

The men at this nineteenth century Elsinore need no excuse to wear swords on occasion, and there is still a period quality about it all that fits in with the text more harmoniously than a 1945 locale ever could. The incidental music by Roger Adams, while featuring the usual trumpetings, at one point introduces a Viennese waltz.

Mr. Evans' performance is, as before, noteworthy for its clarity, lyric quality and skill. He passes, it seems to us, the acid test of a superior Hamlet—an ability to illuminate all over again the familiar speeches of the Dane. The supporting cast is for the most part good, including an effective Polonius in Thomas Chalmers, who makes the windy old bore more of a person and less of a caricature than usual; a regal queen in Lili Darvas; a willowy, well spoken Ophelia in Frances Reid and a boorish King in Thomas Gomez, looking something like Henry VIII masquerading as Edward VII. Frederick Stover's sets were not only handsome but swiftly shifted with a minimum of noise and fuss.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

The Sun

DECEMBER 14, 1945

Evans Is Magnificent in the G. I. Version of 'Hamlet,' Presented by Todd.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The gory old castle at Elsinore, scene of carnage and violence through the years, was restored to the New York stage last night when Michael Todd, moving up to the northern margin of theatertown, put on "Hamlet" at the Columbus Circle Theater. It is a "Hamlet" that has rhythm, beauty and vitality, and Maurice Evans, returning to the role of the Prince, is magnificent.

Here is a cut version of Shakespeare's tragedy, a production along the experimental lines followed by Evans for his G. I. audiences in the Pacific. The presentation, unshackled by tradition, is vividly imaginative and the play loses none of its grandeur by the eliminations that have been made.

It's a "Hamlet" cut and tightened. Portions have been telescoped or boldly eliminated. Liberties have been taken that might have been more than a little shocking to some of the Shakespeare-minded. The churchyard scene has disappeared and the clowning grave diggers are not in the play. The costuming is now from unspecified periods of the nineteenth century.

Maurice Evans is still, to my notion, the most exciting Hamlet who has come along since John Barrymore gave his limitless art to the role in 42d street three and twenty years ago. He is eloquent, vivid and alert. He is always the cerebral Prince and never a neurotic one and there is a great clarity to his reading all the way. As I wandered out into the snows of Columbus Circle at 11:20 last night in quest of the underground it was my impression that I had just witnessed a performance by the best actor in New York.

There are mediocrities here and there in the casting of this Evans-Todd-G. I. Joe "Hamlet," but there are also some sound performances. Thomas Gomez, who was working for the Lunts not so long ago, speaks extraordinarily well as the evil and conscience-stricken King Claudius. Lili Darvas is somewhat less successful as the tortured Queen. Frances Reid makes a real person of Ophelia. The gabbling, prying and tragic Polonius is impressively played by Thomas Chalmers, always to be counted on for good service to a play.

Emmett Rogers is a fiery Laertes and Walter Coy an acceptable Horatio. Those double-faced fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, come forth as a low comedy team in the performances of Howard Morris and Booth Colman. The Ghost is well done by Victor Thorley, as is the Player King by Nelson Leigh.

This new production has been skillfully staged by George Schaefer, former technical sergeant, who served with Major Evans in the Pacific. The costumes of Irene Sharaff, the scenery of Frederick Stover and the music of Roger Adams contribute to the quality of the presentation.

The New York theater has been in the debt of Maurice Evans since he first played Hamlet at the St. James. And the undernourished theatrical season of 1945-46 gains mightily by the production that he and the dauntless Todd have brought into Columbus Circle.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 14, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

GI 'Hamlet' Is Mixed but Lavish, Fascinating

Michael Todd is an eclectic and impartial impresario. Slightly to amend the motto of Terence, nothing concerning the theater is alien to his generous purse. He has lavished just as much care and money upon his production of Maurice Evans' GI "Hamlet" as if it were a drama like "The Naked Genius" or a musical like "Something for the Boys." It is a production to see, perhaps to see twice—in order to be sure you saw right the first time.

This "Hamlet," which opened with great eclat and ended with vociferous applause at the Columbus Circle last night, is the cut, altered, recostumed and re-envisioned version which, after numerous experiments, Mr. Evans found that the men in the armed services in the South Pacific seemed to like almost as well as they liked his musical, "Three Jerks in a Jeep." The text and Mr. Evans' idea of what the boys would go for in the way of Shakespearen interpretation remains unaltered; only a professional cast of supporting actors and a Michael Todd investiture have been added.

For the Uninitiated.

"Our current production," Mr. Evans has stated, "endeavors to approach the play as if it had never been played before and had never been available in written form before. Although a realistic approach has been striven for, we have shunned any tendency toward vulgarization. Faced with the hazards of a service audience, I came to realize completely what I had long suspected—that there are two ways of producing Shakespeare: one is to present it for the enjoyment of the traditionalists; the other for the uninitiated."

He felt that traditional costumes would not be acceptable to soldier audiences and that the men would wonder why the players wore swords. So "we settled for an almost story-book period of Mitteleuropa, 19th century, as conveying the dual features of a court at once military in character but at the same time decadent." . . . And, as a result, last night, I kept confusing "Hamlet" with another version of the Affaire Meyerling, expecting Luba Malina to step out at any moment and sing, "When I Auditioned for the Harem of the Shah."

Suggests Two Schools.

Mistake not; I was absolutely fascinated by this "Hamlet." It was unlike anything I ever saw or ever expect to see. I felt that I was seeing a kaleidoscope of two different schools of Shakespearean interpretation. First was the traditional one of elocutionary windmill work (speeded up to George Abbott time), played by Mr. Evans, Victor Thorley and Lili Darvas. However, I liked better the modern, more natural, or Margaret Webster, type of of Shakespearean interpretation play by Thomas Gomez, as Claudius, Thomas Chalmers as Polonius, Frances Reid as Ophelia, Emmett Rogers as Laertes and Walter Coy as Horatio, with the other principals alternating between the two conceptions.

Mr. Evans' Hamlet seemed to me fussy rather than distracted, absent - mindedly preoccupied rather than anguished in soul and irresolute in purpose. His voice is clear, pleasant and wide in range, but his articulation is often either nervously too rapid, like a football coach putting a team through its paces. In his speech of advice to the players, he seemed to me to violate every precept he gave them.

Thomas Chalmers' Polonius is the best one I have ever seen. Too often the role is played with comic exaggerations, whereas it should be played straight, with overtones of the pathos of senility. But here Mr. Evans, in his colloquies with Polonius, portrays Hamlet as obtuse, self-centered and insensitive in his angry and impatient treatment of the old man, and so adds to my impression of his Hamlet as a superficial, self-seeking egotist, with no deep feeling or emotion for anyone except that of hatred for his mother for having disillusioned him about womanhood and marriage.

Gomez Good as King.

Mr. Gomez is marvelously real as the king, for all that he is got up like Edward VII in court dress and one almost expects him to come out in one scene in a Prince Albert coat and wearing an Ascot tie. Miss Reid handles the mad scene touchingly, and the Messrs. Rogers and Coy played as though they had been coached by Miss Webster in naturalness and underemphasis. . . . There is incidental music by Roger Adams, some of which contributes to the mood and some of which detracts from it, as, for instance, the waltz tune, showing a ball in progress during Hamlet's first feigning of madness before the king.

The whole point of "Hamlet" seems to have been lost in this production. But it is a bizarre theatrical experience anyhow, and I recommend it, pretty much as I would recommend Ringling Brothers circus or Billy Rose's Aquacade, to those who had never seen either.

"Brighten the Corner"

The Sun

DECEMBER 13, 1945

'Brighten the Corner,' Lyceum's Comedy, Falters After Lively First Act.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

It's the philosophy of John Cecil Holm that money is no good unless you use it in his writing of "Brighten the Corner," farce comedy of mistaken identity, which opened last night at the Lyceum. Jean Dalrymple, who entered the managerial field last season with "Hope for the Best," makes the presentation.

"Brighten the Corner" is an unoffending little play that offers some fun but not enough. It starts with a rather lively first act and falls away steadily thereafter. In the final act it runs down completely, despite the efforts of the deadpan comedian, Charles Butterworth, in his dazed, detached and befuddled way, to keep things going.

The co-author of the unforgettable "Three Men on a Horse" presents the case of a rather rich and somewhat cracked inventor, a perpetual undergraduate at Massachusetts Tech, who comes to New York to call on his newly married nephew and to give him and his bride $10,000 for a wedding present. But before the gift is finally bestowed upon the couple there are three acts of complications, all serving to increase Uncle Jeffrey's bewilderment. He is a gay old boy, however, and a sport, too, and proves it via his checkbook.

"Brighten the Corner" is of the exit-and-entrance school of comedy, calling for a lot of door slamming and across-stage traffic. A manufactured play, it is crowded with familiar ingredients and as the evening progresses the author begins to run out of gags. Perhaps the play's funniest moment is that in which Lenore Lonergan, posing as the nephew's wife so that the whimsical benefactor can leave the $10,000 check and be sped on his way, appears in a dinner dress that is a size or so too small for her. Miss Lonergan, growing up from play to play and from season to season, brings her excellent sense of timing to all her scenes and is very funny in moments when the script gives her a chance to be, but these don't come too often.

Charles Butterworth is amusing as the visiting uncle, who is happiest when handing out money or reeling in a tarpon. In the second act he goes into something of a vaudeville specialty, showing how an out-of-towner tries to get sleep in the tumultuous city of New York. He is at his best in the opening act and, like the play, he becomes a little winded as the evening goes along.

Jean Dalrymple has assembled some attractive people for Holm's play. Phyllis Avery is pretty and appealing as the nephew's real wife. George Petrie gets quite a workout as the harassed young husband and Gene Blakely tries to squeeze some comedy from the role of the other husband, who has to take to the fire escape. Arthur O'Connell has done the staging. Willis Knighton's setting, inclusive of an automatic elevator, is a very neat one.

"Brighten the Corner" offers some laughs but it is far from being a first-rate farce comedy.

'BRIGHTEN THE CORNER.'

Comedy by John Cecil Holm; directed by Arthur O'Connell; setting by Willis Knighton; presented by Jean Dalrymple at the Lyceum Theatre, Wednesday, December 12, 1945. The cast:

Opal Harris	Dottie Cooper
Jarl Carson	Phyllis Avery
Nail Carson	George Petrie
Dell Marshall	Lenore Lonergan
Jeffrey Q. Talbot	Charles Butterworth
Townsend Marshall, Lieut., U. S. N.	Gene Blakely
Delivery Boy	Paul Stanley
Officer Robertson	Robert Simon

SYNOPSIS: Scene, The living room and outer hall of the Carsons' upper East Side apartment in New York City. The time is the present. Act I. Early evening in September. Act II. Much later the same night. Daybreak, in fact. Act III. Later that morning.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 13, 1945

Charles Butterworth's Drollery Brightens 'Brighten the Corner'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Brighten the Corner," which Jean Dalrymple presented last night at the Lyceum, is a mistaken-identity farce whose action is slight, whose humor is very often delightful and whose star is Charles Butterworth, the man who has made the uncompleted sentence and the uncompleted gesture into a fine career.

It is all very well to say that a drama reporter should be impersonal, unprejudiced and stuffed with noble purpose whenever he goes to see and write about a play; but there do come times when the reporter finds himself looking at something by an old, dear friend —and what he has to write is, therefore, personal and prejudiced.

So this is personal and prejudiced, because John Cecil Holm, who wrote "Brighten the Corner," has been a dear friend for 10 years and is besides one of the most engaging off-center humorists alive. Mr. Holm, either in his play or as himself, never bats you over the head with a joke. He just edges up to a joke and then circles past it, leaving you to get almost past it, too, before you catch yourself and turn around and look and begin to laugh.

Good Butterworth Stuff.

For instance, a young husband in "Brighten the Corner" says, after a sleepless night of mixed identities, that he is going somewhere for a good day's sleep. Mr. Butterworth, who is the cause of the scrambled names and the wakeful hours, considers this in his mild way for a moment and then says to himself, "I'd like to have the address." I'm not selling this as a killer of a joke, but it is good Butterworth and it is good Holm. I suppose the technique is what Hollywood calls the delayed take.

A connoisseur of the delayed take, or of the funny line which pretends it isn't funny, will find "Brighten the Corner" rewarding. An aficionado of Mr. Butterworth's special drollery will enjoy himself, and will, as I did, nearly bust at Mr. B.'s soundless and almost motionless reaction to the crashing of some dishes in an offstage kitchen, or to his repeated efforts to go to sleep in an apartment which is being kept awake all night by telephone calls and cops. A spectator interested in discovering that Lenore Lonergan, just a child actress heretofore, is a fine player of grown-up farce will also find pleasure at the Lyceum Theatre.

Mixed Doubles.

But we — the connoisseur, the aficionado, the spectator and this particularly prejudiced old friend —are specialists. If you want to join one or the other of us you will have fun at Mr. Holm's play. If you are looking for a socko, whammo comedy you will discover that a promising, mirthful first act is followed by two more acts which now and again almost stop dead in their tracks.

In the play Mr. Butterworth is Uncle Jeffrey, a middle-aged visitor to New York who has spent his life attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and now has more than 1,800 credits and patents on several useless inventions. He drops in on a nephew and his wife to give them $10,000, but the nephew happens to be, very innocently, with the wife of a neighbor. So these two pretend to be married in order to get the ten grand, and the real wife and the other husband pretend they are married, too.

Phyllis Avery, George Petrie and Gene Blakely serve pleasantly as the other principals. The setting is by Willis Knighton.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 13, 1945

Where You Were

By LEWIS NICHOLS

John Cecil Holm cannot be accused this morning of undue inventiveness. His "Brighten the Corner," which opened at the Lyceum last evening, is more clatter than play. Into it he has poured mistaken identity, mixed husbands and their wives, pajamas, a wildly ringing telephone, a policeman, a good many people asking "What's going on here?" a self-operating elevator, a maid named Opal—and not nearly enough humor to win the cause. In directing, Arthur O'Connell has tried, not successfully, to build rapid dashes about the stage into wild farce, and even Charles Butterworth's specialized style cannot overcome the fact that the play is neither new nor often funny.

The Carsons, male and female, have not long been married, nor have the Marshalls. The middle-aged uncle of the former, who has been a student at M. I. T. for generations, and is an inventor besides, comes to pay his respects. Does he think Mrs. Marshall is Mrs. Carson? Ah, yes. Does she, knowing there is $10,000 in it for her pals if the mistake is never found out, carry on the pretense? Any writer of farce can go on from that point, and most of them have at one time or another. Mr. Carson and Mrs. Marshall spend the night in one place, their worser halves in another, and the uncle, who has had too much to drink, of course, spends it in the living room in view of the audience. Writing this one backwards sometime might be a good change.

Granting Mr. Holm a few amusing lines and those in charge with one or two deft bits of action, "Brighten the Corner" still is low on watts. Surprise is an essential of farce, and there is very little of it here. Mr. Butterworth comes on rather late in the first act, after interminable conversation which has nothing to do with what happens later; it is as though Mr. Holm started to write a comedy about the home life of the Carsons and then changed his mind on finding a comedian available. The dazed manner of that comedian is a help, of course, but it would be a more uproarious manner in circumstances less worn. Mr. Butterworth tries with all his force, but the way is hard.

Of the others, Lenore Lonergan has her first adult role after being one of the theatre's more picturesque brats. As a grown-up she is easy and blondly sardonic, but whether she will ultimately become a Duse or a Bea Lillie "Brighten the Corner" does not say. Phyllis Avery is attractive as Mrs. Carson, George Petrie seems thin and trained down for his running role as her husband and Gene Blakely is Mrs. Marshall. The maid, whose duties include boiling eggs and taking out the dog, is played by Dulcie Cooper. Willis Knighton has designed a terrace setting with an elevator which seems to really go up and down, up and down, as farce disgorges its freight and then takes it back again.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

DECEMBER 13, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Butterworth's Corner

CHARLES BUTTERWORTH'S dead-pan drollery is worked overtime in the wisp of a farce which has come to the Lyceum. Good as it is to see the comedian back in the theater, it is a pity that it had to be in so paltry a concoction as "Brighten the Corner." There are times when he has some lines and bits of business which actually sparkle. More frequently the John Cecil Holm piece has the actor stripping to underpants or donning an old-fashioned nightshirt for laughs. All the improvisation in the world would not make this bedroom burlesque genuinely entertaining. Butterworth does some fancy pitching, but the resultant amusement is desultory.

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The author is a great believer in props. He has thought up a split setting which permits performers to appear on an automotive elevator, up and down a flight of apartment house stairs, in and out of a bedroom and kitchen and over and out a balustrade. Not content with that, he has arranged for a folding bed in the living room which gives endless latitude to the projection of what might laughingly be called a central idea. Two young married couples get mixed up in the furniture. The star spends a sleepless night and some trying moments in the midst of the commotion.

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Rarely has a star been asked to do so much to so little avail. There is a scene in "Brighten the Corner," if memory serves, which has him deep-sea fishing from a sofa. There is quite a to-do throughout about making out checks for his nephew and a complaisant friend who pretends, for no very good reason, to be the nephew's wife. The interruptions of a tiny plot are interminable, including odd entrances by a cop and a broadcast by the Little Flower himself. Nonsense has its place in an out-and-out farce, but Holm has failed dismally in making it funny. Give Butterworth virtually individual credit for the laughs at the Lyceum.

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The supporting company had every right to be confused by the script. It is also somewhat baffled by Arthur O'Donnell's direction, which generally takes the form of stage after-thoughts. Suffice it to say that Lenore Lonergan makes the most of getting into an evening gown which was never built for her and that Phyllis Avery is at least decorative as the real wife who finds herself passing as a Fuller Brush saleslgirl. George Petrie and Gene Blakely stalk around as masquerading husbands and Dulcie Cooper is serenely oblivious to the exposition as a maid. Butterworth has to do it the hard way and it is hard indeed in "Brighten the Corner."

PM EXCLUSIVE

DECEMBER 13, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

It Sure Needs Brightening

PM Reviews

John Cecil Holm, who once wrote an extremely successful farce called *Three Men on a Horse*, has this time written an extremely unsuccessful one. His new work might, indeed, have been called *Three Acts on a Toboggan* for, starting at no very dizzy height, it careens downhill all the way. Straight Broadway farces of the type that Mr. Holm concocts do not strenuously engage the critical faculties. They either succeed in getting more and more comical as they get more and more complicated or (as the phones go on ringing, the doors go on slamming, the mix-ups go on multiplying) they get more and more like cold scrambled eggs.

Sometimes, to be sure—as here—they start with an idea that only a real optimist would imagine could be stretched out for three acts. *Brighten the Corner* would pant and puff from plot trouble, I suspect, even if its dialogue were considerably more amusing than it happens to be. Mr. Holm is telling of a pair of newlyweds who are awaiting a flying visit—and a fancy wedding check—from the husband's rich eccentric uncle. When he arrives, the wife (whom he has never met) is out, and he mistakes another young bride for her. Figuring he'll be off in a minute, leaving the check behind, the other gal doesn't enlighten him. Naturally he decides to stay on, and the other bride has to play on. Like that other farce about mistaken identity, *She Stoops to Conquer*, this one might be subtitled *The Events of a Night*. For, among other things, the supposed wife eventually has to retire with her "husband" and the mix-ups go on until morning.

The whole thing has a forced, rattle-trap quality, with the complications getting cornier and cornier. And *Brighten the Corner* can't even scare up much dialogue to brighten the corn. Once in a long while a fairly amusing line pops out, and there is one really funny moment, when Lenore Lonergan, as the supposed wife, has to squeeze into a dress that is much too tight for her. Beyond that, the only manna is Charles Butterworth's amiable personality. But it should be put to more amiable uses. Miss Lonergan, now grown up, still has her froggy voice, which at times she still uses effectively; but she, along with Phyllis Avery, George Petrie and Gene Blakely, is in general the victim of a wheezy script and of wobbly direction.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Journal and American

DECEMBER 13, 1945

'Brighten The Corner' Opens at the Lyceum

By ROBERT GARLAND

My mama, she told me, when I was in knee pants and determined to be a professional first-nighter, there's no treasure more difficult to safeguard than the friendship of a theatrical producer. Maybe, I can't help thinking, the old lady had something there. Tomorrow will doubtless tell! For Jean Dalrymple—she who produced last night's "Brighten the Corner"—is both a producer and a friend of mine.

That is to say, she is a producer and she was a friend of mine when, last midnight, I sat down in friendship, to write this piece for the paper.

And this piece for the paper starts out by frankly admitting that, in her role of producer, Jean Dalrymple has given John Cecil Holm's new play almost everything it could possibly have been given. She has given it a first-rate star in Charles Butterworth, first-rate supporting players in Lenore Lonergan, Phyllis Avery and George Carson, and a first-rate upper East Side background by designer Willis Knighton.

What she hasn't given them—what Jean Dalrymple hasn't given her star, her supporting players and her designer—is a first-rate script on which to display their talents. Or a first-rate director to aid them.

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Everybody's Uncle

In "Brighten the Corner," the author of "Three Men on a Horse" works hard to tell the story of one man on a bender. That one man is Jeffery Q. Talbot, everybody's Uncle Jeffrey. The bender on which he gets himself is the result of too many Manhattans, too much Manhattan and an overdose of absent-minded whimsicality. I, along with the outspoken Lenore Lonergan, find Uncle Jeffrey definitely unbalanced.

Being balmy, he dearly loves to give his money away and keep it, too. And, while doing so, to mix up married folks and their home life like crazy.

Dropping in on the Neil Carsons, en route from wherever he was to wherever he is going, he mistakes Mrs. Marshall for Mrs. Carson, Mrs. Crason for the Fuller Brush Girl and Mrs. Carson's home-sweet-home for a night-club. From an early evening in September until the early morning-after, he scrambles husbands, wives and bedrooms while making out checks with one hand and destroying them with the other.

Finally, after countless comings, goings and coming-back-again, Uncle Jeffrey passes out new checks to everybody, from Opal Harris, the opulent hired girl, to Jeri Carson, the expectant mother.

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More 'Americana'

Although it hurts me more than it hurts Jean Dalrymple to say so, that's just about all there is, there isn't a whole lot more. So Charles Butterworth, as the first-rate star I said he is, ekes out the evening by enlarging on the after-dinner speech which has been his specialty since it makes him famous back in the dear dead days when the Belmont Theatre was housing—and how successfully!—the revue, "Americana."

But, left high and dry, without sustained assistance from his playwright—or, for that matter, from his director—the Butterworth buttering spreads thin.

Lenore Lonergan, in a becoming grownup role, is still a rising young comedienne. Yet it is a trick costume that furnishes her foremost fun. As one of the scrambled wives—Miss Lonergan is the other—Phyllis Avery is more than the author ordered. Robert Simon, as Officer Robertson, is a policeman out of William Saroyan. And the background by Willis Knighton is one of the best on Broadway.

As a theatrical producer of skill, taste and perserverence, my friend Jean Dalrymple brings more to "Brighten the Corner" than the John Cecil Holm play brings to her. My mama, she could have told me that, too!

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 13, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'Brighten the Corner' Is Bright, Corny, Funny

If Jean Dalrymple, producer of "Brighten the Corner," could have heard the happy, almost continuous laughter at the Lyceum last night, her health should have taken a quick turn for the better. I think, and hope, it will today, anyhow. News from West 45th St. should be almost as restorative as sulfa or an oxygen tent.

Miss Dalrymple has been seriously ill of bronchial and lobar pneumonia. Although she is well-known as a publicity director, this is only her second offering as an entrepreneuse. Her first one was something of a mistake. Although I myself did not find this one as hilarious as many others found it last night, it is definitely amusing and entertaining. It looks like another "Three Is a Family" in more ways than one, but particularly as a popular laugh show.

A combination of dead-pan Charles Butterworth and frog-voiced Lenore Lonergan, given any fairly bright material to work with, would be hard to beat in the farce-comedy field. But John Cecil Holm, the author, making up for some of the misfires since "Three Men on a Horse," has put his best efforts into farcical lines and situations that never let Mr. Butterworth or Miss Lonergan down. And Arthur O'Connell has paced the domestic mixup at four-alarm speed.

Nonsense, But Good.

It is all as silly and improbable as "Charley's Aunt," which is what good stage nonsense should be. It has not social value except the highly therapeutic value of provoking laughter. It is highly contrived escapist stuff, but who doesn't want to escape, even for only two hours, from some of the things we have to endure, including news of crime waves and of United Nations discord, the subway mess and the string of plays that have opened and shut since Labor Day?

The story has to do with the efforts of a young couple (George Petrie and Phyllis Avery) to cinch an outright gift of $10,000 and a $25,000 bonus for a baby from an eccentric bachelor uncle (Mr. Butterworth) and the deception they played upon him with the aid of their friends, the Marshalls (Gene Blakely and Miss Lonergan).

When Uncle Jeffrey arrives at the Petrie apartment in New York, full of beneficent intentions and roseate conceptions of the happy home life of his nephew, his niece-in-law has just left her husband's bed and board after a lover's quarrel. Her girl friend is in the bathroom (she had just dropped in for a shower on her way home from work) and unaware of the quarrel. There is the quick pretense on the part of the nephew that the girl is his wife. This deception is kept up for 24 hours, with great complications, including the efforts of the couples to regain their rightful spouses without undeceiving Uncle Jeffrey and thereby losing the promised cash and future bonus.

All Clean Fun.

There is plenty of action, including one very funny bit in which Miss Lonergan has to get into one of Miss Avery's evening gowns for a night out with Uncle Jeffrey. The gown is so tight it hobbles her and she can't sit down. She has just taken the gown off and is in her scanties (during the absence of Mr. Petrie and Mr. Butterworth) when her husband comes in, wildly seeking her. He is considerably taken aback until the situation is explained to him. But it is all nice clean fun and nothing indecorous is ever suggested in the play.

Mr. Butterworth's physiognomy and comic technique are so familiar that it is superfluous to dwell upon his merits as a comic or even to comment that he is encouraged by the director to play from the apron of the stage. Miss Lonergan in her first grown-up part is simply Miss Lonergan in a grown-up part and she can be, and is, funny even without her voice—merely with her indolent eyes and her precociously disenchanted mouth.

The rest in the cast are mere foils to these two, but very good foils they are, especially Robert Simon, as the policeman on the beat. The set by Willis Knighton is comical, too.

New York Post

DECEMBER 13, 1945

'Brighten the Corner' Works Hard but Sheds a Poor Light

By Wilella Waldorf

John Cecil Holm wrote "Three Men on a Horse" but you'd never know it from "Brighten the Corner," his latest farce produced by Jean Dalrymple last night at the Lyceum. Although Charles Butterworth (in person) and Lenore Lonergan are present to do what they can to keep the laughs bubbling along, Mr. Holm's unoriginal little play often defeats them.

"Brighten the Corner" is based on a none too comical plot idea to begin with and almost every move the harassed characters make is so predictable that there is very little suspense. Consequently the author, and the director, Arthur O'Connell, rely to a considerable extent on gags, stunts and the introduction of extraneous characters to brighten the corner as much as possible. Long before the second act was over both of them seemed to be completely winded.

Mr. Butterworth, who can be a very funny fellow on occasion, plays a rich and eccentric uncle who drops in on his nephew in New York on the way to Florida. Nephew and wife have just had a tiff and wifey has walked out in a huff. But her best friend happens to be in the bathroom taking a shower. Since Uncle Jeffrey intends to stay only a few minutes, and wants to give the happy couple a check for $10,000 as a belated wedding present, friend is induced to pose for the nonce as nephew's wife.

This is really all Mr. Holm has to build on and it doesn't fill out three acts, although it is evident from the first that Uncle Jeffrey is bound to be delayed, stay over night and make it necessary for the farce to become a mild sort of bedroom farce before the evening is over. There is a good deal of dressing and undressing, shower taking and cocktail drinking, and Mr. Butterworth spends a long time in the second act trying to get some sleep in the living room while various people come and go, the telephone rings, a Naval lieutenant arrives via the fire escape and a chummy policeman drops in for a chat.

This sort of foolishness, punctuated by bewildered ejaculations on Uncle Jeffrey's part that New York is certainly a busy place, etc., is funny off and on for a while, but it's familiar stuff at best and too drawn out here to prove half as comical as the author seems to think it is.

Perhaps the most telling commentary on the inadequacies of the script is the fact that two of the biggest laughs of the evening came not from the lines, but from what the actors happen to wear. There were guffaws when Miss Lonergan, playing the obliging friend, turned up in an evening dress far too tight for her and couldn't even manage to sit down, while Mr. Butterworth's appearance in an old fashioned nightshirt naturally raised the customary uproar. But "Brighten the Corner" as a whole struck us unhappily as a surprisingly routine and labored farce.

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"The French Touch"

New York Post

DECEMBER 10, 1945

'The French Touch' at Cort Is Very Heavy-Handed

By Wilella Waldorf

Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov have written a labored and often rather tasteless French farce about a celebrated Parisian actor-manager and his three wives, set the whole thing backstage at the Theatre Roublard, Paris, right in the middle of the German occupation, and peppered it thickly with some very American gags about ham acting and show business, collaborationists and the underground, Nazi numbskulls, the black market and how hard it is to carry on the usual amorous intrigues with so many people freezing or starving to death. Oooo-la-la!

"The French Touch," produced last Saturday evening at the Cort, raises its curtain on the great Roublard and his third (current) wife sleeping in one of the stage boxes at the Theatre Roublard, which hasn't had a play on the boards since the Germans marched in.

The new Nazi Minister of Culture, however, once attended the Sorbonne and as a stage-struck youth greatly admired Roublard and his first wife and co-star, Jacqueline Carlier. He still admires them—especially Jacqueline—and insists that Roublard write a new drama showing how easy it is for the Germans and the French to get on together.

Since mixing cement in Poland is the alternative, Roublard does as he is told, but falls in with Jacqueline's suggestion that a final secret scene be concocted for presentation on the opening night urging his countrymen to keep on resisting the conquerors. The actor is given to making extravagant theatrical gestures and he can almost see French schoolchildren hundreds of years hence worshipping him as a hero in their history books.

There's an idea here that, expertly handled, might have been developed into something, but the Messrs. Fields and Chodorov have neither the French touch nor the imagination and playwriting ability to make anything of it beyond a flock of gags, some funny, some obvious and overdone.

Early in the first act, when the jokes were flying fast, "The French Touch" provided some laughs, but the authors never seemed to make up their minds whether they were writing a comedy poking fun at the theatre and its hams, an old-fashioned French farce full of amorous boulevardiers, wives and mistresses, or an anti-Nazi melodrama complete with guns and the Gestapo.

After the first scene in Act I, interest ran steadily down hill, and, although George Jenkins' Paris theatre set was effective enough, Rene Clair, the French (and Hollywood) film director, made very little of what meager stuff the authors gave him, and sometimes, as in the shooting of the Nazi official, managed to mess things up pretty hopelessly.

The company, from Brian Aherne down, suffered from the prevailing indecision of authors and director, and often seemed none too certain what sort of show it was supposed to be acting in. Most successful at picking a style and sticking to it were John Wengraf as the Nazi official and Arlene Francis as Jacqueline.

'THE FRENCH TOUCH'

Comedy by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov; directed by Rene Clair; production designed and lighted by George Jenkins; presented by Herbert H. Harris at the Cort Theater, Saturday evening, December 8, 1945. The cast:

Patard	John Regan
Roublard	Brian Aherne
Gisalle Roublard	Jacqueline Dalya
Schwartz	William Melton
Felix von Brenner	John Wengraf
Jacqueline Carlier	Arlene Francis
Boucot	Ralph Simone
Henri	Jerome Thor
Georgette	Louise Kelley
Nanette	Mary Cooper
Toto	Richard Bengali
Marcel	John Graham
Robert	Stewart Stern
Madelaine	Sara Strengell
Odette Ranoux	Madelaine Le Beau
Reiner	Dave Hyatt

Synopsis—The scene of the play is the Theater Roublard in Paris, spring of 1943. Act I, scene 1: Early afternoon. Scene 2: Evening. Four weeks later. Act II, scene 1: The following evening. Scene 2: Three weeks later. Scene 3: The following day.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 10, 1945

Touche

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Every playwright's typewriter can break down on occasion and that jointly owned by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov has done so in "The French Touch.' The collaborators' new comedy, which opened Saturday evening at the Cort, bears few family resemblances to "My Sister Eileen" or "Junior Miss," its predecessors. Instead of being easy, this one is forced; instead of being written in the warmth of an amiable spirit, it suggests two authors trimming a play with a cold chisel. Its gaiety is contrived so obviously that it ceases to be gay, its characters are seen only from the distant outside. In short, the week-end reflections are bleak.

One drawback to "The French Touch" is that the Messrs. Fields and Chodorov are writing several stories. Their central figure is a Parisian actor-manager-playwright who, declining to collaborate with the Nazis, is existing in cold grandeur in his own theatre. Part of the play tells how he is persuaded to dash off a drama that the Germans will think in good order, but that will have a patriotically-French ending. The rest tells of the actor's private life. At the moment living with his third wife, he is not clear of the other two, and the Nazis, with a surprising taste for the publicity angle, think that all three should appear in the play with him.

A drama could be written about the theatre under occupation, but the Messrs. Fields and Chodorov have not chosen to go into it fully. Instead, they prefer to paint again that portrait of the actor as a temperament. They say nothing new. Their creation once more is the egoist, his wives are spitfires and variations on the five-letter word. There are no distinct and clear-cut characters, with the possible exception of the Nazi minister of culture, who at least is efficient and knows what he is about. In their comedy the authors too often make plays upon theatrical expressions, a specialized form of humor which should lie beneath them.

As the main figure, Brian Aherne has a role that any actor would find hard to resist—but which he should. Possibly Mr. Aherne is a little young, despite make-up, to be Paris' leading and much-married playwright; he goes at it with the vigor of a whirlwind. Arlene Francis is believable and charming as the first wife; Jacqueline Dalya and Madeleine Le Beau are Numbers Three and Two respectively. John Wengraf is very fine as the minister of culture, and in a somewhat stock part John Regan does all right as the Sancho to Mr. Aherne's Quixote. René Clair, as director, has been unable to put sparkle into a play that basically lacks it; the hero of the evening undoubtedly is George Jenkins, whose setting of a theatre is excellent.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 10, 1945

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Loses Its Touch

ASIDE from the fact that "The French Touch" is dated it is altogether ambiguous. There is little chance at the Cort Theater of finding out whether this comedy by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov is chiefly concerned with the fate of occupied France or the destiny of a triple-married actor-manager. It tosses several laugh-lines off in the course of its make-believe meanderings, but they are generally incidental to what purports to be a plot. Even with the emphatic acting of Brian Aherne and Arlene Francis in leading roles and the shrewd staging by Rene Clair it is no better than a theatrical zombie.

* * *

The authors have keyed their farce into the French resistance movement without sticking to their guns. It is all very well that they have shown an egotistical ham actor supposedly collaborating with the Nazis in order to deliver an ultimate speech that will make him a hero to generations of school children long after he has had his head chopped off. Unfortunately they have become so entranced with their central character that they have embroidered his amours to a point where the offering becomes a polite burlesque of "Up in Mabel's Room." There are moments of merriment in "The French Touch," but they are no more tangible than an overheard anecdote.

Aherne has the wheel-horse job in the show and he keeps going around in spite of the script. As a matter of fact, he contributes a comparatively nonest portrayal of Roublard, who plays fast and loose with Nazis, Free French and three wives. If the comedy keeps him guessing as to whether he is a right guy or a wrong guy that is the essential fault of the production. Miss Francis, for all her efforts, is miscast and unconvincing. The romantic implications of a theme which keeps flipping romance against patriotism slips through her fingers like buttered sand.

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By far the best of the performers in "The French Touch" is John Weingraf. As a Nazi minister of culture, he sums up some of the pertinent dramatic asides which make the play disappointing rather than disastrous. Jacqueline Dalya and Louise Kelly, as a couple of Roublard's exhibitionistic inamoratas, are up to their assignments, such as they are, and John Regan does what he can with the part of the actor-manager's Man Friday. Clair, as already noted, has given the work a Gallic flavor, but he has not been able to keep it from falling heavily somewhere between farce and fact.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 10, 1945

'The French Touch' a Mildly Funny Story of Parisian Star and Nazis

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is a very pleasant air about "The French Touch," and some amiable actors are in it. There are some good, sharp jokes, too. But there also is a feeling of indecision which becomes acute at the end of the second and final act, so the play resolves itself into one of those things with which one cannot quarrel, but which should be better.

Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, the scenarists of "My Sister Eileen" and "Junior Miss," have written a comedy about a Parisian actor of the theatrical and conjugal standing, say, of Sacha Guitry. The time is 1943, the Germans are in France, and the Ministry of Culture wants the actor to collaborate by writing and producing a play which will lead to amity between Germany and France. His supporting cast is to include one current wife and two former wives.

It is indeed a break for this actor, for he has nothing left but his theatre—his very own theatre—where he has set up housekeeping in a stage box. When the Minister of Culture provides some food, wine, money, actors, sets and costumes, it is a fine break for a starving ham. Particularly when one considers that the ham has written a secret ending for his collaborationist play—a patriotic ending which will rally Frenchmen to the cause of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Mr. Fields and Mr. Chodorov have written comedy which is more theatrical than French. I never felt that anybody involved was really Parisian when I saw the play at the Cort Saturday night, but I did feel that the cast all were actors impersonating actors—with the exception of John Wengraf, who played a German minister of culture with astonishing charm.

The atmosphere is backstage, and I suppose backstage is the same in any country, with its squabbles, egoes and attitudes. In "The French Touch" all of this is amusing, and for it George Jenkins has designed another of his delightful settings. Rene Clair, noted French movie director, handles his first stage chore gracefully and amusingly.

The casting of Brian Aherne as a strutting star is practically perfect, and there are nice performances by Arlene Francis, Jacqueline Dalya and Madeleine le Beau as his three wives.

But having got together an affable company and some funny lines, the authors and their producer, Herbert H. Harris, have been unable to make the most of them. The only way they have figured for ending the comedy is to have the ham shoot the Minister of Culture by accident—and that is no way to end a comedy, even when the guy who has been shot is a former member of the former master race. It is an act of desperation, not dramaturgy.

PM Exclusive

DECEMBER 10, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

Paris Proves Unusually Dull

PM Reviews

THE FRENCH TOUCH

A lot of people who spent Saturday evening at home probably had a bigger night of it than those who went in all their finery to the Cort. In times past the Messrs. Fields and Chodorov have entertained us with such lively jobs as *My Sister Eileen* and *Junior Miss*, but on Saturday night they were not very entertaining. They tried to be; they tried like the very devil. Writing of a Nazi-occupied Paris, they batted out more gags than most playwrights could have dreamed up about infinitely more cheerful locales. With quiet American determination, they tossed in more sex than a French libertine would know how to cope with. As a matter of fact, it's more than they know how to cope with. It gets monotonous. And the rest of their play, except for one or two briefly amusing scenes and some scattered lines, is pretty feeble and forced, and pretty cheesy.

The French Touch has chosen to make a farce-comedy out of what might have been a melodrama, and the choice is nothing in itself to quarrel with. The hero of the play, one Roublard, is a celebrated, hammy, three-times-married Parisian actor and playwright who is ordered by the Nazi Minister of Culture to write a collaborationist play. He sets about writing it, and is branded a traitor by his associates—until he confides in them that there is a surprise finale in which he will denounce the Nazis, after which he will whip out a revolver and shoot the Minister of Culture dead. This is the "serious" bit of story round which the Messrs. Fields and Chodorov have twined a farce about sex and a spoof about actors. For all three of Roublard's wives are allotted roles in his drama, all three engage his ego and arouse his passions, all three scratch and claw at one another, all three make mincemeat of rehearsals. Since one of them has also captivated the Minister of Culture, the plot thickens—before it finally congeals.

* * *

One could write, and men indeed have written, very rich comedy about people who are sitting on the edge of a volcano; comedy that is deepened by the tragic atmosphere surrounding it. So, here, Mr. Fields and Mr. Chodorov had a chance to do something rather notable with their theater folk whose gesture of defiance must almost certainly spell death. But far from doing that they haven't invested their Nazi-occupied Paris with the slightest reality, they haven't achieved in the midst of their comedy a single moment of pathos; they have merely put their grim background to the cheapest, glibbest possible use. But the worst part is that even on their own gag terms they can only occasionally be amusing. They get a few spots of fun out of kidding the ham in actors, a few more out of the collision of the three wives. But there is far too much of the same sort of kidding, the same sort of colliding; and Roublard's love-making seems about as French as French Lick.

The production is also quite an affair. Brian Aherne, fortified by the knowledge that he was impersonating a ham, went all-out to do the part justice. Arlene Francis, as Wife No. 1 and a great actress to boot, was rather obvious in her comedy, and quite taken, too, with her great-actressy moments. The other two wives were played by Jacqueline Dalya and Madeleine LeBeau, both pretty girls but not inspired performers. Much of the blame may have rested on Rene Clair's very disappointing direction, but not all: as the Nazi Minister, John Wengraf, managed to turn in a quite effective performance.

LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The Sun

DECEMBER 10, 1945

'The French Touch' Aimless and Flimsy Play, and It's Miscast at Cort.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov had an exultant notion for a play in "The French Touch," and their new comedy is one that probably reads well in the script, but in performance it is aimless and flimsy and often broadly farcical. The production, sponsored by Herbert H. Harris, came into the Cort Saturday night.

"The French Touch" reveals only a measure of the felicity that went into the writing of "Junior Miss" and "My Sister Eileen," both from the Fields and Chodorov workshop. The play suffers also from being badly miscast. It's a comedy that shrieks for the presence of Lunt and Fontanne. Brian Aherne, in the role of a celebrated French actor-dramatist, badgered by the Germans into giving a performance at his Parisian playhouse at the time of the Nazi occupation, lacks the range, the flamboyance, the variety for the role, and his co-players, with one notable exception, are equally deficient.

As it is performed at the Cort, the only really fascinating and interesting character in "The French Touch" is that of the Nazi Minister of Culture, played by John Wengraf. Nazi villains have become stock figures in our theater and Wengraf's characterization is in the accepted tradition, but he reveals himself, as he did in Maxwell Anderson's "Candle in the Wind," as an actor of skill and fluency. His transitions from suavity to rage are neatly executed. All of his scenes are exceptionally well done.

There are elements of an amateur charade in the Cort's new play. The amusing interludes come only at rare intervals as Fields and Chodorov tell their story of the temperamental French actor and his trials and his wives. He is living with his third wife in his cold and bleak theater, without food or fuel, and sleeping in the proscenium boxes as the play opens. The authors bring in the wily Von Brenner, Minister of Culture, and bring on Roublard's two former wives, and endless squabbling sets in. Roublard writes his propaganda play, as ordered by the Nazi, but he also writes another ending which isn't in the submitted script, and one pledging eternal loyalty to France. And it is this French touch that is to be given in the public performance of the play, though death be the penalty. The Nazi minister, done in by an accidental pistol shot, is not around to witness Roublard's big moment of martyrdom.

The character of the egotist, Roublard, who is all through the play and all over the stage, calls for a Lunt, a Barrymore, a Leo Ditrichstein in his prime. Brian Aherne, for all his capabilities, just isn't the swaggering, beguiling, overpowering fellow the authors sought to write into their play. Arlene Francis, while the best of the feminine players, is only partially successful as the great lover's first and favored wife. Most of the others of the Cort's cast just go through the motions, and not particularly engagingly.

There are elements of farce, comedy and drama in the Fields-Chodorov play and in this case the ingredients don't mix successfully. The play seems to have undergone considerable revision and redirection and the job of tinkering hasn't been to its advantage. Herbert Harris's expensive production provides staging by Rene Clair of film fame and scenery designed and lighted by the resourceful George Jenkins.

"The French Touch," on the basis of its presentation Saturday evening, is a flaccid comedy, only occasionally diverting, and the right players are not upon the stage of the Cort.